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REFORM IN THE GERMAN HIGHER SCHOOLS AND THE REFORM MOVEMENT IN MODERN LAN- GUAGE TEACHING

At a certain number of German gymnasiums and so-called realgymnasiums a thorough reform has been going on for several years tending to change the order of subjects of instruction and to remove the many complaints which are heard in these schools from parents and pupils.

One of the greatest inconveniences now existing is that a father has to decide very early whether he shall devote his son to classical studies or to modern ones. He must make his choice when he is scarcely able to discern his son's abilities—that is, when his son is only ten years old, or even younger. To know a child's inclination for a profession at so tender an age is altogether out of the question. So the father sends the boy, for better or for worse (at a venture), to one of the above named schools, a gymnasium, or a realgymnasium. Should the child fail in his attempts to get on at this school, he is sure to lose at least one precious year, for he will certainly—coming from a gymnasium—not be received in the same class, but in a lower one, and *vice versa*. To avoid this inconveniency, the reformed schools of both kinds have the same plan of teaching for five years, from the sixth to the upper third form.

At the age of fifteen or sixteen years a boy's gifts are clearly developed, and it is then no matter of difficulty for the parents to launch a boy for a certain career in life. In this respect the establishment of reformed schools is, indeed, a progress.

But it is so, too, in another point of view, *i. e.*, in regard to the different lines of instruction which are taught in the different classes. Up to this day the teaching of Latin begins in both kinds of schools in the lowest class, and occupies the greatest part of the boys' time, absorbing nearly their whole strength. How the boys are tortured with learning the names of thousands of incoherent things in one year, the abundance of

declensions and terminations, the abstract grammatical rules, the necessity of thinking in a foreign idiom when they have not yet learned to think in their own, or perhaps even to think at all, all this you know best yourselves. But perhaps you will say, as a great many people say here: "We have been forced to learn it (everybody, however, takes care to say, 'I wished to learn it, I was eager to learn it, I was enchanted with learning it') and so young ones must learn it too." If we adhere to such principles there will be no progress in the world, and if people had thought like them the torture and the rack would still be in use; for our forefathers might have said: "The criminals have been tortured as yet, so this useful institution must forevermore remain in use!"

No, it is a progress that the reformed schools have altered the succession of the subjects of instruction and that they do not begin with the difficult language, and a dead one, too, but with the easy one and a living one, besides, which the boys can hear, speak at home, and which they really like to learn, which they learn even to speak with enthusiasm, not because of the language, but because it is taught otherwise than has been done with Latin.

This language is French, and the great spell which it possesses is that the pupils learn not only to read and write it, but also to speak it, and, what is more, first to speak and then to read and write it. What a pleasure it is to teach a class of gifted boys a living language! You show them first the characteristic marks of French pronunciation, the nasal sound, the *son mouillé*, the position of the tongue (the base of articulation, as the modern philologists call it), and then you wander with them round the schoolroom, showing them the different objects in it, denoting them with your finger and telling the French names. How eagerly they follow that finger, how they vie with each other in repeating the French words. And then you form questions, of the easiest kind of course, but they enable you to make a conversation with the boys. What a pride swells their youthful hearts! They return home, shouting when they enter: "We have spoken French, mamma! Look here: *Qu'est-ce que c'est?*

(pointing at the window). Now answer, ma ! What a pleasure for him if, when she answers with a smile : *C'est une fenêtre*.

After having taught them how to write and read the words they have first learned to speak, just as it is done with the native language, you leave the schoolroom, you take a walk with them through the town, through the garden, to the wood, into the country. To assist their fancy you get large pictures representing the objects which you intend to show them, attached to the blackboard or to the wall, and the pupils' eyes sparkle as they look at the pictures, and they follow you as willingly and as gladly as if you were really going to take a walk with them.

Then you read with them from their French reader. You learn short poems by heart with them, and if you are a musician—no matter if you are a very poor one—you sing some French songs with them. If you can do this—that you are absolutely master of the class is a matter of course—the boys will do wonders and rapidly improve their pronunciation, which is twice as clear and correct in singing as in speaking. Finally, you tell them short tales, and you may depend upon it, the more interesting your tale the better they will understand you, the sooner they will be able to tell you the whole story again.

You see such a lesson is full of life ; there are none of the boys who sit there dreaming of the toys at home or playing with trifles under the desk while you exert yourself to teach them. But perhaps you are an adherent of the old system, dreadfully antagonistic, and you say to me : "You forget of what use Latin is to French when it is taught first. The boys learned so rapidly and easily *table* = *Tisch* from *tabula*, *plaindre* = *klagen* from *plangere*, *teindre* = *malen* from *tingere*," etc. There is no gainsaying, but do you doubt, dear sir, that the boys will have any more difficulty in learning *tabula* = *Tafel* when they know already the French "table," and when the teacher explains to them that the two languages are intimately connected ?

Latin lessons in the reformed schools of both kinds begin in lower third, and, joined to mathematics, they weigh heavily upon the boys in the lower and upper third. From the lower second there begins the division of the two schools : the gymnasium

teaches Greek, the realgymnasium English; and now they differ widely from each other, the former laying the chief weight upon classical languages and history, the latter on modern languages and mathematics—the former preparing for the universities, the latter for the technical high schools. There is a great tendency at present, even in high places, to grant the pupils of the realgymnasium the privilege of studying medicine at the universities, a privilege which they indeed deserve, but it is still to be obtained.

The great advantage of the reform movement is to have altered the succession of the subjects of teaching, to have given a common base to the two rival schools, and, last, not least, to have granted to the native language, to German, an appropriate and worthy place among the subjects for instruction, just in the beginning of the training of the minds, from the sixth to the fourth class, where it occupies most lessons beside the French. You can no longer reproach us with neglecting our mother tongue, and with the absurdity of teaching German by the example of Latin and Greek.

It is a progress, but much remains still to be done, especially in a sanitary point of view. The wants of German schools in this respect will be shown when I shall have the pleasure of expressing to you the progress in teaching English after the new plan of the reform schools.

OSCAR THIERGEN

DRESDEN
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